

## **Associated Press (1-13)**

Pa. families get no quick answer from EPA on water

By GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press – 38 minutes ago

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Residents of a small northeastern Pennsylvania town at the center of the political fight over natural gas drilling struck out Friday when they tried to take their complaints directly to the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

A handful of residents-turned-activists from Dimock joined about 50 environmental activists from neighboring communities and elsewhere to rally outside a conference at Philadelphia's Academy of Natural Sciences on urban environmental issues, chanting, "Lisa Jackson, take some action!" Their hope was to find a kindred spirit in EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and to ask her directly to have fresh water delivered to them.

But they didn't get the chance.

The moderator of the panel on which Jackson sat did not ask any of the Dimock-related questions that were submitted. And at the end of the session, Jackson did not respond when one activist shouted out a question. She also did not meet with any of the protesters who attempted to confront her afterward.

The Dimock residents among the protesters remained optimistic that Jackson will come to their aid — something they say state officials are refusing to do.

"We're here to make sure that she knows we appreciate that and putting a face to what's going on," said Julie Sautner, a Dimock resident whose well is contaminated.

A state investigation found that 18 wells in the Susquehanna County village were contaminated after natural gas drilling began there in 2008.

About a dozen residents have sued Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., claiming the energy company caused the contamination when it extracted natural gas using a process known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a method that has spurred a boom in natural gas drilling in several states while raising concerns about the toll on the environment and public health.

Cabot denies contaminating the wells, saying most wells in the region were laced with methane long before the arrival of drilling. Nevertheless, the company trucked in fresh water for the residents to use for bathing and washing clothes and dishes. The deliveries stopped Nov. 30 after state regulators determined that Cabot had fulfilled its obligations to the residents under a 2010 consent agreement. The residents say their aquifer is still contaminated.

Pennsylvania's environmental chief, who works for a pro-drilling governor, has criticized his federal counterparts, saying the EPA has only a "rudimentary" understanding of the contamination.

The federal government, meanwhile, has wavered about its role over the last two months, initially saying the water posed no health risk, then that it merited more study, then in the span of 24 hours last week promising to deliver water and reneging.

Craig Stevens, a resident of Silver Lake, near Dimock, said he called the EPA on Thursday and was told that Jackson would visit the town and would consider bringing water with her. Spokeswomen for the agency did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

In a move that was partly symbolic and partly a practical goodwill gesture, several of protesters brought with them bottles and jugs of water for the Dimock residents to take home.

"It's a ridiculous redefinition of life to have to get bottles of water and to have to live by the graciousness of others," said Victoria Switzer, a Dimock resident who sold gas drilling rights under the 5 acres she owns.

*Follow Mulvihill at <http://www.twitter.com/geoffmulvihill>*

Roy Seneca